

critical digest

505 FIFTH AVENUE, N. Y. 17, N. Y.
EL 6-6894

T. M. KRAUS



June 8, 1955

Vol. VII

No 37

The Weekly New York City Theatre Newsletter

525 Year

This Week

The Trial- Provincetown 6/14. Theatre 12 presents new version of the Franz Kafka play by Aaron Fine and Bert Green, staged by Dennis Vaughan.

Future Dates

Almost Crazy-Longacre 6/20...Morning's at Seven Cherry Lane 6/22...Aquashow-Flushing Meadows 6/21...American Nights-Jones Beach 6/23...Stage Struck-Bijou 7/7...Fred Waring Pleasure Time 1955-Ziegfeld 8/8

Fall Dates

D'Oyly Carte-Shubert 9/27...Maurice Chevalier 9/28...A View of Bridge-9/29...Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter 10/1...Diary of a Young Girl 10/5... Joyce Grenfell Requests the Pleasure-Bijou 10/10...The Lark-10/12...Pad Roses for Me 10/20...No Time for Comedy 10/20...Comedie Francaise-Broadway 10/25... Janus-Plymouth 11/7...Pipe Dream-Shubert 11/30.

Summer Tryout Dates

Whisper to Me-Dallas 6/13...The Fairlee Fortune-Bucks County 6/15...Palm Tree in Rose Garden-Pocono Playhouse 7/18...Snuggets-Westport 7/18...Reluctant Flute-Hude Park 7/19...The Geep-Ogunquit 8/8...& Mighty Man is He-Falmouth 8/15... Devil's A Stranger-Rebeth Beach 8/22

Digests of Current Week Theatre Reviews

The King and The Duke-Circle in Square 6/1. Re-opening of Circle in Square, in accordance with fire and police regulations, was greeted by NY drama critics, but Francis Ferguson's "melodramatic farce based on Huckleberry Finn" drew four mild con notices. News and mirror aisle-sitters did not cover show. Funke, Times, found little that could be called theatre. Story line, to him, was too much like a cartoon. Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Watts, Post, doubt if any playwright can ever equal the fun of the Twain original. Herald Tribune man added fact that story is buried deep beneath a blanket of sound. Ralph Williams as Huck drew the best of the mild notices. Post man joined others in blaming non-theatrical writing for their negative feelings. McClain, Journal American, also filed a con vote, but thought play however muddled or pretentious possesses style. Music by G. Wood, he added, is sung with distinction which creates an atmosphere of violence and emotional stress which pervades the entire evening.

Add Mark Twain Theatre

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, a one man musical version of the classic presented at Westport, Conn., Assumption School, made an interesting evening, but could not be considered as a Broadway show, rates Ross, Herald Tribune. Performance was an attempt to interest producers in a full-scale production.

London Report Concluded

The Lark, Anouilh's version of Saint Joan with an English text by Christopher Fry, does not compare favorably with the current London production of Shaw's Saint Joan starring Siobhan McKenna, reports Atkinson, Times...Danny Kaye back at London Palladium is in top form, the master of the informal style of entertainment...Into Thin Air by Chester Erskine, staged by Garson Kanin, was one of those little pieces of theatrical mal-practice that one sits through in a state of numbed horror, critic recounted. But unlike Broadway where critics might be blamed for death of play, production vanished into no air at all after 4 performances.

Variety Scorecard of Critical Toughness 1954-55

Kerr, Herald Tribune, filed more "unfavorable" notices than any other NY daily drama critic, Variety survey reports. "Unfavorable" means that critic predicts show will flop. Scorecard shows Kerr filed "unfavorable" votes on 37 shows, Watts, Post, 30, McClain, Journal American 27, Hawkins, World-Telegram-Sun, 25, Coleman, Mirror, 26, Chapman, News, 22, and Atkinson, Times, 18.

NYC Center Light Opera Company will present each production next season due to the success of this year's enterprises. Brigadoon and Kiss Me Kate are two of three shows which will be presented for three weeks each. William Hammerstein has flown to San Francisco to arrange transportation of the west coast production of Brigadoon.

Plays

Maurice Chevalier will play for six weeks at Playhouse starting Sept 28...Janus will feature Margaret Sullavan, Claude Dauphin and Robert Preston in Carolyn Green comedy produced by Alfred de Liagre, Jr., due at Plymouth in mid-November...Joyce Greenfel, British comedienne will make her US debut Oct 10 at Bijou in Joyce Greenfel Requests the Pleasure, presented by Austin-Noyes-Stevens...Fred Waring's Pleasure Time 1955 due at Ziegfeld Aug 8...Elia Kazan considering presenting Greek drama next season.

Players

Ralph Bellamy re-elected to a three year term as president of Actors Equity...Shelley Winters signed to co-star with Ben Gazzara in A Hatful of Rain...John Tyers replaced Norwood Smith, Can Can...Geoffrey Lumb replaces Francis Sullivan, and Joan Alexander replaces Patricia Jessel, both in Witness for the Prosecution, both for one month...Don McHenry given leave of absence from Fanny to play in Medea in Paris Denis Carey will direct The Lark... Marie Torre, amusements editor of NY World Telegram-Sun, joined Herald Tribune TV department...Fact Finding Committee of stage theatre unions will pay tribute to late Lee Shubert via bronze plaque on 45th St side of Booth Theatre...George Heller, executive secretary of American Federation of Television and Radio artists, died at age 49.

Legal Department

Herman Shumlin lost suit to halt Dallas performances of Inherit the Wind by Margo Jones Theatre '55.

Summer Playhouses

Theatre Tours has opened box office at Broadway Theatre. Tickets for shows, dinner and transit to Lambertville, NJ, Westport, Conn, New Hope, PA, and Asbury Park, NJ, summer theatres sold as package unit. Wonderful Town at St John Terrell's Music Circus, Lambertville, NJ, June 15-26 opens Alexander Cohen operation. Tickets for bus, show and dinner at Aquoclub total \$7.70. Busses leave Tues, Wed, and Thur at 4:30 PM, Sat and Sun at 4 PM. See "Playgoers Guide Chart" for detailed data.

Tennessee Williams' short story "3 Players of a Summer Game" will be staged at White Barn, Westport, Conn., June 12...Clarence Derwent stars in Frank Wedekind's King Nico June 22 at Lincoln, Mass...Capri Theatre, Atlantic Beach, NY, debuts June 28 with Sylvia Sidney in Constant Wife...Show Boat '55 Theatre Reboth Beach, Del., will present The Devil's A Stranger Aug 22, and Last Days of Pompeii Aug 29.

Other Broadways

Teahouse of August Moon will be presented this summer by Kabuki Theatre, Toyko...Henry Hull will tour nation this fall in readings program from Mark Twain...Jean Giraudoux' Tiger at the Gates okayed by London reviewers...Theatre Guild-American Theatre Society attendance in 18 cities increased 5257 last year to a total of 85,271.

Theatre Ad Notes

Circle in Square frank ad in Times noted that group is proud of King and the Duke... "Despite negative reaction of a few daily critics we firmly believe (it) is our finest production", ad stated...Inherit the Wind display ad reminded that show now gives Wed and Sat matinees at 2:30 PM.

Theatre Record Notes

Mister Roberts scenes from play and film will be presented on June 19 CBS TV Ed Sullivan...Library of Congress has filed CBS Radio "Stage Struck 1953-54" series...Dramatists Guild has filed letter with FCC backing Pay as you see TV...CBS presented \$10,000 gift to American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, Stratford, Conn...NBC TV will present opening night scene of Julius Caesar from Stratford, Ontario Shakespearean Festival June 27 8 PM.



GREEN

ROOM

DEPARTMENT

BEST SEASON... Theatrical season just ended has been the best in recent years, sums up Watts, Post. The quality of the plays, while it still leaves a lot to be desired, has shown a gratifying improvement. The percentage of successes has been unusually high, and the general box-office receipts have reached a new high figure. There is also the indication of a new atmosphere of creative energy and enthusiasm, critic believes. His own list of 10 best plays of seasons includes--Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Bus Stop, Inherit the Wind, Witness for the Prosecution, Desperate Hours, Bad Seed, Wayward Saint, The Maids, 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, and The Flowering Peach.

COLUMN TIPS... Seventh Heaven producer Gant Gaither signed a \$300,000 deal for TV rights after show's Broadway run, reports Wilson... Winchell hears that producer of Seventh Heaven has barred director John Wilson from backstage.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS... Inherit the Wind shows that you can make good theatre out of an idea and a character, notes Lerner, Post... The people in Bus Stop are small people, but their problems with life and love are our problems, believes NBC Pearson... "The Great American Musical" has replaced "The Great American Novel" is the goal of most writers, it seems to Watt, News, who would not be surprised to hear of a musical version of the "Yellow Pages" of the telephone book.

DRAMA MAIL-BOX... Drama critics were labeled absurd for referring to the lack of the original flavor in the current Seventh Heaven by a Times reader who had never seen the stage or film versions... Off Broadway's practice of waiting for the audience to find the out of the way playhouses, thus starting from 15 to 25 minutes late, was condemned by a "C.D." reader.

SALUTING FRANCE... Theatre plans of ANTA Salute to France program were panned by Nathan, Journal American. Choice of Mary Martin in Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth, critic thinks, is not wise because musical star's dramatic ability is not equal to the French concept of a dramatic actress. And putting producer-director George Abbott in the same play is not apt to persuade the French of the glorious state of American histrionic art. In addition, French playgoers are already familiar with this play and should have been presented with a better example of US playwrighting. Robinson Jeffers' Medea may not equal France's own versions of tale by Racine and Corneille. French friends inform the reviewer that ANTA choices are too stuffy and too arty.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES... Return of "family-type" burlesque has been a long battle for T.J. Phillips, Milstein, Times, discovered. His on-stage chores included roles in Ziegfeld Follies with Jack Pearl and in a George White show with Bert Lahr. He formed the Burlesque Artists Association in 1933. Between 1943 and 1949 he worked as a longshoreman. Unlike the Minsky brothers, the slogan of the Brooklyn Orpheum shows will be "Keep It on."

PROS & CONS BY TMK

The King and The Duke, a melodramatic farce from "Huckleberry Finn", marked the re-opening of the pioneer Circle in the Square group. But play which might have made a pleasant folk-tale with a minimum of cast, was over-produced to the point of often appearing like a combination Talent Scout Show and TV version of a Minstrel show.

The Maids is well worth the trip and trouble it takes to find Tempo Playhouse, which is across the street from Cooper Union. Genet play receives an inspired trio of performances, whatever you may decide the play is about. Stein's "Selections from the First Reader" are well done bits of sinister nonsense. Tempo Theatre is presenting well done, experimental theatre, one of the real reasons for the Off Broadway movement.



OFF
BROADWAY

Paul Osborn's Morning's at Seven will be presented by Proscenium Productions at Cherry Lane starting June 22. Thieves' Carnival closes June 12...June Walker will have leading role in Morning's at Seven, Harrison Dowd, Dorrit Kelton, Tom Bosley, and Gubi Mann are featured.

Two Irish plays, The Only Jealousy of Mary and The Player Queen presented at IMHA, both plays directed by Jenny Eagan... "Magic Flute" concert production by Can-Can cast members presented Sunday at Malin Studios... The Bewitched and the Be-wildered by S. Johnson and A. Coch presented May 31-June 7 at Auditorium of Greek Cathedral, 319 E 74... Lois O'Brien replaced Elise Rhodes, Phoenix 55... Grant Leehtous, a NY film producer, considering a CinemaScope Color film of Phoenix 55! with current cast.

2 for Fun at Greenwich Mews added 2 mild pro votes from Geor, Variety, and Kerner, Women's Wear, and a con vote from Herridge, Post. Trade-paper mugg marked twin bill as an off beat evening of theatre done with energy group has established as its trademark. Kerner enjoyed Chekhov's "The Anniversary", but thought "Switch in Time" satire repetitious. Post drama editor panned Russian classic as dated, and second piece for wearing a joke too thin.

The Maids presented by Tempo Playhouse was applauded by Hawkins, World Telegram-Sun for being remarkable in its originality and its executions. Julie Bovasso presents a tour de force in her role. Stein playlet was also cheered, especially work of director Stanley Robertson.

Summer Issues C.D.

C.D. will cover tryouts of new plays in Eastern summer theatres as reported in trade papers, local dailies, and via personal inspection. Plus other features.



THEATRE
BOOK
COMMENTS

"Victor Herbert-A Life in Music" by Edward Waters (Macmillan) is the definitive biography of the beloved musician, recommends Chase, Times

"This Way, Miss" by George Jessel (Holt) was listed as breezy reading all the way by Abel Green, Variety editor, who filed his review in Sunday Herald Tribune book section. Book is shrill, staccato, sentimental, brittle, shrewd, oftentimes witty, betimes sage, but never dull.

"Danton's Inferno", NY News' columnist Danton Walker's autobiography (Hastings House) was rated a breezy, enjoyable autobiography by Down, Variety, who only wished for a more inspired title.



THEATRE
TV
COMMENTS

"Petrified Forest" presented by NBC TV Producers Showcase with Humphrey Bogart, Henry Fonda and Lauren Bacall drew a widely diverse set of notices from NY TV critics. Gould, Times, rated it a hit, catching successfully most of the poignancy and melodrama of the original. Van Horne, WWD, though thought Sherwood drama was badly miscast except for Bogart. Shalit, News, disagreed. He thought casting perfect and 20 year old script still ripsnorting melodrama. Rose, Variety, feared spirit of the mood piece was not always intact, some of it due to miscasting of Fonda.

THEATRE

OUT OF TOWN

The Tender Trap continues as Chicago's lone legit show... Kismet stops in Dallas... Los Angeles playgoers can see Pajama Game, Solid Gold Cadillac, Seven Year Itch plays Philadelphia... Tea-house of August Moon now in Seattle... San Francisco playing Dear Charles, Tea and Sympathy and Kiss Me Kate.

Off Broadway Events

8 actors from Inherit the Wind are featured in June 12 twin-bill at 4th St Theatre of Shaw's The Shewing Up of Bianco Posnet and Richard Davidson's A Different Drum.

